

light trucks again enjoy a significant regulatory advantage. While the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) system requires each manufacturer's fleet of cars to average 27.5 miles per gallon, light trucks must average only 20.7 miles per gallon. Yet with the rising popularity of the heaviest SUVs, all three U.S. automakers failed to meet that standard for the 1997 model year. (Because several years' averages can be lumped together, one year's average does not violate the Clean Air Act.)

To Leonard, that difficulty is a good indication of the utility of tighter mileage requirements. "Judging by the difficulty that we and other domestic manufacturers of full lines of trucks and SUVs have had in meeting CAFE, there's very little ability to improve at a reasonable price," he says. But environmentalists argue that 6,000-pound vehicles with V-8 engines are not necessary to haul groceries from the supermarket. "All the improvements [in fuel economy] are getting eaten by increases in performance [such as more horsepower, bigger engines, and faster driving speeds] and rising vehicle weight," says Martin Thomas of the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy in Washington, DC. "If we held performance constant, there could be improvements in fuel economy."

SUVs also have an outsized appetite for other raw materials. The auto industry already consumes 27% of aluminum, 35% of iron, and 14.5% of steel used in the United States. As increasing sales of ever larger trucks boost the average vehicle size, rising materials consumption will raise the environmental toll of mining, processing, and discarding or recycling these materials.

The issue of size also plays a role in safety. SUVs and light pickups are not only more massive than cars, they also have high, stiff frames that override the protective component of cars. When one car strikes another, 6 people die in the struck vehicle for every 1 in the striking vehicle, according to Julie Rochman, communications director of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, an industry group in Arlington, Virginia. But when SUVs strike cars, the ratio is 27 to 1.

That doesn't mean that SUVs are any safer than cars, however. Rochman points out that since SUVs have high centers of gravity, they roll over easily. Indeed, the institute recently analyzed car and truck accidents and, Rochman says, found that "in each weight class, if a crash takes place, your chances of survival are better in a car."



Supplemental Information

Taking herbs is one of the oldest and most enduring ways of treating human maladies. By one World Health Organization estimate, nearly 80% of the world's population, some 4 billion people, use herbal medicine for some aspect of their primary health care. The U.S. Congress acted in 1994 to reduce FDA control over herbs and other dietary supplements, making them more accessible to a thriving market in this country.

Though no longer evaluating the safety of new herbal supplements before they reach the market, the FDA continues to warn consumers of dangers that may be associated with taking them. An important part of this effort, and a valuable resource for anyone using dietary supplements, is the FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition's (CFSAN) dietary supplements Web site at <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/supplmnt.html>. Here, the FDA warns consumers about the possible risks involved in taking herbal supplements with names like Sleeping Buddha, Herbal Fen-Phen, and Chomper.

In some cases, risk information is based on the testimony of consumers and doctors who have noticed disturbing side effects from using an herbal product. The CFSAN Web site allows users to alert the FDA in such cases and also to find out if anyone else has reported problems with a particular supplement. Both can be done easily by following the Special Nutritionals Adverse Event Monitoring System link on the CFSAN dietary supplement page. For example, entering the term *Hypericum perforatum* (St. John's wort) will return two reports of adverse side effects observed in people using this popular herb.

For researchers who want to investigate the health benefits and risks of taking herbal supplements such as St. John's wort, another informative resource is the Web site of the NIH National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), located at <http://altmed.od.nih.gov/nccam/>. This office collects and organizes a tremendous amount of information and research on a broad range of alternative treatments, from herbs and acupuncture to prayer and diet (click first on What Is CAM? and then on Classification of Alternative Medicine Practices to view the whole list).

The Information Resources link on the NCCAM home page routes users to references such as the CAM Citation Index, a searchable database of over 90,000 alternative medicine citations from the National Library of Medicine. The citations can also be browsed by disease, treatment method, and symptom by following the Browse link on the CAM Citation Index page. Most herbal supplement citations can be found by following the CAM Methods link to the Phytomedicine page. Information about the NCCAM's programs and publications can also be accessed by following the NCCAM Clearinghouse link from the Information Resources page.

Besides organizing information, the NCCAM also sponsors research on alternative treatments. The Research Grants link connects users to information on what projects the NCCAM has funded in the past, while the Research Funding Opportunities link connects to the types of investigations that the NCCAM plans to support in the future. For example, by following the Request for Proposals link, users can see that the NCCAM would like to coordinate a multicenter clinical study of the efficacy of St. John's wort in fighting depression. Information about submitting grant applications to the NCCAM is available via the Grant Preparation link, and information about student, postdoctoral, and clinical training opportunities at the NCCAM is available under the Research Training link. Through the CFSAN site and the NCCAM site, medical professionals, researchers, and consumers can access important information on a growing variety of herbal products.

